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# The Impact of Cultural Dissonance and Acculturation Orientations on Immigrant Students' academic performance\*

El impacto de la disonancia cultural y las orientaciones de aculturación en el rendimiento académico de estudiantes inmigrantes

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**Abstract:** Prior research has documented meaningful differences between school performance of immigrant and native students. Multicultural education has been associated with academic failure of foreign students. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of a set of psychosocial variables on the perceived academic achievement of first generation immigrant adolescents from public secondary schools in Northern Spain. Results showed that 46% of the variability in foreign students' perceived academic performance was explained by home-school cultural dissonance. We also explored the impact of acculturation orientation to separation, perception of discrimination from teachers, school adjustment, and psychological well-being in academic performance. Any multicultural education context should take into account psychosocial adjustment, given its influence on academic performance of all students.

**Keywords:** immigrant students, multicultural education, cultural dissonance, academic performance.

**Resumen:** Se han hallado diferencias significativas entre el rendimiento académico de los inmigrantes y el de los estudiantes nativos. Sin embargo, hay una escasa evidencia acerca de los aspectos psicosociales de este fenómeno. El objetivo de este estudio fue examinar el impacto de un conjunto de variables psicosociales: disonancia cultural y orientaciones de aculturación en el rendimiento académico percibido de adolescentes inmigrantes de primera generación de centros de Educación Secundaria en el Norte de España. Los resultados mostraron que alrededor del 46% de la variabilidad en el rendimiento era explicada por la disonancia cultural entre escuela y hogar. Cualquier contexto de educación multicultural ha de tomar en consideración el ajuste psicosocial, dada su influencia en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** estudiantes inmigrantes, educación multicultural, disonancia cultural, rendimiento académico.

Educational processes are very important for the construction of the personal psychosocial trajectories of adolescents. On the one hand, they allow students to apprehend cultural values, belief systems, and behavioral social guidelines (Briones, Tabernero, & Arenas, 2011). On the other hand, they enable students to construct academic skills and knowledge, which are certified by schools, determining to a large extent students' social participation and their positive future positions within the labor market and the socio-economic structure (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Shang, O'Driscoll, & Roche, 2016; Feito, 1990). These socio-cultural functions of education have a particular impact in the case of immigrant students. For these students, school represents the main space of contact with the host society, providing not only daily interactions with local peers, but also chances for cultural interchange and tools for social mobility. In fact, as prior research on different immigrant groups has shown achieving better education for upcoming generations, with the aim of improving their life conditions and social status in the future, tends to be a central element of family migration projects (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Gloria et al., 2005; Hill & Torres, 2010).

In Spain, 8.9% of the students in Secondary School come from foreign countries, mainly from Latin America (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, 2017). The immigrant student body represents 6.5% of total secondary students in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country in Spain, from which around 50% corresponds to Latin-American students; 16.8% to the European Union; 14% to Maghrebians; 9.4% to Asian Countries; 5.7% to Sub Saharan Africa; and 3% to non-communitarian European countries (Basque Government, 2017).

According to the *Program for International Student Assessment -PISA*, 2012- of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014), immigrant students obtain scores of about 50-70 points lower than local adolescents in science and reading comprehension. Moreover, studies have confirmed that immigrant status is related to lower achievement levels at schools (Basque Institute of Evaluation and Research on Education, 2011, 2012; Mera, Martínez-Taboada, & Elgorriaga, 2014). Other studies that analyze the same data have associated immigrant students' results with variables such as the parents' level of education, home resources, segregation, and high immigrant concentration in schools (Calero, Choi, & Waisgrais, 2010; Choi & Calero, 2013).

There is a lack of research about the psychosocial dimensions that influence the educational process. Literature about the education of immigrant adolescents shows that several variables are critical to school achievement. One variable that influences academic performance is the length of residence in the host country. The first years of migration represent a stage of adjustment to a new context, in which higher stress levels and mood disorders tend to affect psychosocial functioning (Mindlis & Boffetta, 2017). As time goes on, these initial difficulties tend to be overcome and the establishment of new social relations has a positive

effect on the adaptation of immigrant adolescents to the host community (Berry et al., 2006).

Personal well-being is also critical to school academic performance because it fosters self-efficacy (Amutio, Franco, Gázquez, & Mañas, 2015; López-González, Amutio, Oriol, & Bisquerra, 2016). Likewise, feeling accepted in one's community and comfortable with school assignments is an important indicator of well-being at school (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003; Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Gutiérrez & Gonçalves, 2013). Adjusting positively to the school environment is one of the main socio-cultural tasks for adolescent development (Erikson, 1968). For immigrant students this process is more complex, and previous research has shown that students who fit well into school tend to have higher levels of school satisfaction (Berry et al., 2006). This tendency has been associated with some variables, such as the importance that immigrant families generally give to taking education as a responsibility and obligation (Berry et al., 2006; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004).

At the same time, education and the relationship between families and school are also greatly influenced by the academic achievement of ethnic minority students (Hill & Torres, 2010). Thus, when culturally-based values and behaviors transmitted by the family are perceived as different or contradictory to those promoted at school, academic results might be negatively affected. The so-called cultural dissonance between both systems presents students with the paradoxical dilemma of whether to adhere to the host community's symbolic frame or to maintain their own cultural background (Arunkumar, Midgley, & Urdan, 1999; Gloria & Rodríguez, 2000; Kumar, Gheen, & Kaplan, 2002; Vega, Houry, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, 1995).

Several studies show that immigrant students tend to experience a sense of mismatch between their values, attitudes, and behaviors and the socio-cultural school environment, feeling uncomfortable due to being perceived as *different* by others (Choi-Pearson & Gloria, 1995; Kumar et al., 2002; Mera, Martínez-Taboada, & Costalat-Founeau, 2014; Tyler et al., 2008). Moreover, when students perceive discrimination and rejection from peers and teachers, the education process is perceived as negative and there is an increase in academic failure and school dropout (Berkel et al., 2010; Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010; Chiu, Chow, McBride & Mol, 2016; Franco, Amutio, López-González, Oriol, & Martínez-Taboada, 2016; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

Previous research also indicates that students who perceive themselves as suffering discrimination are more distant from the host society and have fewer possibilities to surpass inter-group boundaries, tending to develop a stronger identity attachment towards their own ethnic groups, in opposition to the majority group (Berry et al., 2006; Mera, Martínez-Taboada, & Costalat-Founeau, 2014; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Alternatively, social groups that have historically suffered cultural domination may have internalized discrimination, as it is the case of postcolonial societies in Latin-American and Africa where main

migratory flows comes from into Spain (Rodríguez & Martínez, 2007), showing out-group preference bias, through which they devalue the groups they belong to (Martín-Baró, 1986; Smith, 2002). These inter-group experiences are expressed in terms of the acculturation orientation developed by immigrants through their adaptation processes (Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrete, & Montaruli, 2009; Checa & Monserrat, 2015) and are related to the degree to which they wish to maintain their own cultural backgrounds, and to the extent to which they are willing to adopt host community culture. The combination of both dimensions results in 5 *positions* in terms of acculturation: *assimilation*, or the adoption of local cultural patterns and the rejection of in-group culture; *integration* or biculturalism, consisting in the maintenance of one's own cultural identity and the adoption of host community cultural elements, which has shown to be related to an improved educational trend, and better psychological and academic results (Bourhis et al., 2009b; Sam & Berry, 2005). *Separation* is expressed by the maintenance of strong attachments to the in-group and the development of a negative attitude towards intercultural contact, which makes it difficult to learn the majority group's customs, behaviors, and language (Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi & Schmidt, 2009). *Marginalization* refers to distancing both from one's own cultural group and the host community and has been associated with social exclusion, a decrease in psychological well-being, and psychosocial risk. Finally, *individualism* is characterized by the interest in upward social mobility and the search for own better status, to the detriment of cultural belonging (Sam & Berry, 2005).

It has been observed that schools that incorporate elements that are culturally relevant to minority students are able to allow students to articulate both home- and school-based values and, thereby, integrate knowledge, which facilitates their cognitive and emotional development as well as their social participation (Shang et al., 2016; Feuerstein, 2001). In contrast, when students abandon their own cultural backgrounds as a requirement for participation in school, their assimilation strategies might result in greater school difficulties (Feuerstein, 2001; Kumar et al., 2002; Ogbu, 1982; Tyler et al., 2008). The pressure to assimilate can generate responses of cultural resistance, expressed through academic failure or dropping out of school (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

In a previous study (Mera, Martínez-Taboada, & Elgorriaga, 2014), a statistically significant difference between immigrant students and their local peers ( $n = 208$ ) in terms of school achievement was found, confirming that this group of foreign students obtained lower levels of academic achievement than did Spaniards. Within this framework, the goal of this study was to examine the impact of the aforementioned psychosocial variables on immigrant students' educational outcomes. We hypothesized that there would be statistically significant, positive relationships between perceived academic performance and students' time of residence in Spain, and also with psychological well-being, school adjustment, integration, individualism, and assimilation. On

the other hand, academic performance would be negatively related to student's perception of cultural dissonance, discrimination, permeability of inter-group boundaries, separation, and marginalization. Finally we hypothesized that perceived academic performance would be predicted by the aforementioned psychosocial variables.

## Method

### *Participants*

Data came from 132 first generation immigrant adolescents (45.2% female and 54.8% male) between 13 and 18 years and with a mean age of 15 ( $SD = 1.13$ ) studying at public secondary schools in the Basque Country (Spain). 67% of the participants were Latin Americans, 24% came from Maghreb, and 9% had migrated from Eastern Europe. Adolescents from different regions of origins had a socio demographic homogeneous profile. Thus, there were not significant differences between groups neither on age ( $X^2_{(2)} = 3.371$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), nor on length of residence in Spain ( $X^2_{(2)} = 1.363$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Also, corrected typified residuals analysis showed there were not relations between region of origin, sex ( $X^2_{(2)} = 2.67$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), and socio educational label of fathers ( $X^2_{(2)} = 9.86$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) and mothers ( $X^2_{(2)} = 5.16$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

### *Procedure*

Student selection was conducted using a convenience sample, according to school availability and the voluntary participation of the students. Four public schools agreed to participate in the study. In order to ensure the participants had sufficient language proficiency to respond the surveys, teachers were asked to identify students whose linguistic skills were not appropriate for this task, and consequently, their participation on the study was discarded. Parent consent was requested by means of a personalized letter. All participants were informed about the goals and confidentiality conditions of the research in order to comply with ethical and legal frameworks. Participants completed the questionnaire protocol voluntarily in their educational centers and during regular class time. Questionnaire administration was done collectively and had an average length of 40 minutes. A member of the research team was available in order to help participants to understand some of the items, even if they were sufficiently language proficient to respond the questionnaires.

### *Measures*

- *Length of residence.* An open-ended question was built to register the number of years and months of foreign students' residence in Spain.



- *School Achievement perception.* School achievement was conceptualized as the perceptions of adolescents about their own academic performance, considering different school tasks as a whole. Spain's data protection rules prevent access to student scores and previous studies confirm statistically significant positive relationships between students' perceptions and their actual results (Hishinuma et al., 2001; Serna, Yubero, & Larrañaga, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). An ad-hoc scale was designed that included students' perceptions about their achievement and the feedback they perceived from teachers, peers, and families. This instrument consists of 4 likert-type items with 5 answer options (from 1 = unsatisfactory to 5 = excellent) (e.g., "In general, I think that my school performance is..."). Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 for the studied sample.

- *Perception of discrimination.* From the Immigrant Adolescent Questionnaire (Berry et al., 2006). Two items from this questionnaire were used in order to measure perceived discrimination at school. It has 5 Likert-type answer options (from 1 = never to 5 = very often) (e.g., "I have been teased or insulted because of my ethnic background," "Teachers treated me unjustly because of my ethnic background"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.75 for the studied sample.

- *School Adjustment Scale* (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Consisting of 6 Likert-type items, with 5 answer options (from 1 = totally agree to; 5 = totally disagree) (e.g., "I feel uneasy about going to school in the morning," "I wish I could stop coming to school"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.63 for the studied sample.

- *Cultural Dissonance between Home and School Scale.* Derived from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale (PALS) (Midgley, Maehr, & Hruda, 2000). It consists of 5 Likert-type items, with 5 answer options (from 1 = totally agree to 5 = totally disagree) (e.g., "I feel troubled because my home life and my school life are like two different worlds") ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

- *Immigrant Acculturation Scale* (Bourhis & Barrette, 2006), to evaluate acculturation orientations. It consists of 5 Likert-type items with 7 answer options (from 1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree) (e.g., "I wish to maintain my own culture, instead of adopting the Basque Country's culture" (Spanish). Cronbach's alpha was 0.62 for the studied sample. This scale has been used widely across others studies (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001; Bourhis et al., 2009a; Bourhis & Hill, 2010).

- *Psychological well-being.* A scale measuring psychological well-being for adolescents was used: *Escala de Bienestar Psicológico para Adolescentes*, (BIEPS-J; Casullo, 2002). This scale has been constructed based on the six dimensions of well-being proposed by Ryff (1989) and evaluates a global dimension, and four additional specific dimensions: control of situations, psychosocial links, projects, and self-acceptance. The scale is comprised of 13 items consisting of statements with three Likert-type options according to the degree of agreement with each of them (1 = disagree to 3 = agree) (e.g., "I have people who help me if I need it"). Its reliability for this sample was  $\alpha = 0.74$ .

- *Intergroup boundaries permeability*. 1 Likert-type item (Navas et al., 2004) with 5 answer options was applied (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) (e.g., “Immigrants who live in the Basque Country (Spain), have the same opportunity to participate in social life under the same conditions as local people do”).

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Mean length of residence in Spain was 4.6 years ( $SD = 3.3$ ). Adolescents' immigrants perceived their academic performance as medium-low, with 52% perceiving that their performance at school was low, while 40% considered it to be average, and only 8% rated it as high. They also showed medium-low perceptions of cultural dissonance, medium levels of school adjustment levels, and low levels of perceived discrimination at school. However, and regarding to the presence of discrimination from teachers and classmates, the most part of them (62.1%) considered it as moderate, whereas a low percentage of foreign students felt discriminated frequently (7.6%).

As expected (Berry et al., 2006) students' orientation to *integration* or biculturalism was over the middle point on the scale between 1 and 7 points ( $M = 4.37$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ ). Additionally, immigrant students showed a high score in *separation*, that is, their tendency to prefer maintaining their cultural norms of origin at the expense of adopting elements of local culture, whereas the obtained mean in cultural *assimilation*, which represents the desire to leave their own cultural heritage to adopt the customs and values of the host society, was low. In the same way, their score in orientation to *marginalization* reflects a low willingness of immigrant adolescents to abandon their culture of origin and to adhere to the local culture, due to the fact that they feel uncomfortable in both of them. The tendency to *individualism*, that is, to distance from both the cultural background and the local in order to focus on personal social mobility, own needs and projections, was also low. Overall, it is important to notice that the highest scores were obtained in the acculturation orientations towards *separation* from the local culture (“I want to keep the culture of my country, instead of adopting the culture of the Spanish, Basque Country”), and *integration* (“I want to maintain the culture of my country, and also adopt some aspects of the culture of the Spanish (Basque Country”). Both orientations share an interest in maintaining one's own cultural values background but, at the same time, adopting the host community cultural elements. In line with this finding, the lowest scores correspond to those options involving disengagement from them. This result indicates that immigrant students would be willing to adopt local elements, to the extent that it is also possible to maintain their cultural background (Table 1).



TABLE 1

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations between immigrant students' perceptions of academic performance and Psychosocial variables

	M	SD	r
<b>Academic performance</b>	2.53	0.98	1
Length of residence	4.63	3.3	-0.02
Cultural dissonance between home and school	2.29	0.91	-0.53 **
School adjustment	3.53	0.79	0.47**
Intergroup boundaries permeability	2.45	1.17	0.2*
Discrimination at school	2.2	0.87	-0.28**
<b>Acculturation Orientations</b>			
Separation	5.05	1.94	-0.2*
Integration	4.37	2.04	0.12
Assimilation	2.06	1.8	-0.01
Marginalization	1.7	1.51	-0.01
Individualism	2.33	1.85	-0.14

Source: own work.

\* p<0.05

\*\* p<0.01

As for the distribution of immigrant students, 47% showed a high preference for cultural *separation*, one-third (33.3%) showed a moderate preference, and 19.7% reported a low orientation to separate from the culture of the host country. With regards to *integration*, 37.9% showed a moderate tendency, 33.3% a high tendency to biculturalism, and 28.8% a low tendency. The vast majority of immigrant adolescent (82.6%) reported a low orientation to *assimilation*, while 9.1% showed a high disposition towards this option, and only 8.3% scored average. As for *marginalization*, 88.6% showed low scores, and 16.1% showed a high tendency to reject adhering themselves to their original culture, as well as to the culture of the host society. Finally, 77.3% of foreign students showed a low disposition to *individualism* as an acculturation orientation, while 11.4% showed average levels and, 11.4% of them high levels.

### *Relationship between academic performance and psychosocial variables*

Correlation analysis presented in Table 1 showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between perceived academic performance of immigrant adolescents and their length of residence in Spain. Instead, there was a positive and a statistically significant relationship between academic performance and a perception of school adjustment, and a negative and significant relationship with home/school cultural dissonance.

Academic performance of immigrant adolescents showed a positive relationship with permeability of inter-group boundaries. Conversely, academic achievement was negatively related both to discrimination at school and cultural separation. This finding shows the negative influence that the perception of being unfairly treated by peers and teachers has on the level of academic achievement among immigrants. Contrary to what was expected, there were no statistically significant relationships with integration, assimilation, marginalization, and individualism (see Table 1).

### *Psychosocial predictors of academic performance*

With the aim of identifying the predictors of immigrant adolescents' academic performance, a linear stepwise regression analysis was conducted that included all the variables with statistically significant correlations with the perception of achievement from these students. Variables were entered in the following order: sex, ethnic group, school adjustment, psychological well-being, cultural dissonance, perceived discrimination at school, inter-group boundaries permeability, and separation. As shown in Table 2, the last regression model included 4 steps ( $F(4.113) = 23.24$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). The model explains 44% of foreign students' perceptions of academic achievement ( $R^2 = 0.46$  y  $R^2$  adjusted = 0.44). The variables retained in the model were: cultural dissonance between home and school, ethnic discrimination perception at school, school adjustment, and psychological well-being (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Multiple linear stepwise regression analysis predicting immigrant students' academic performance

Steps	Regression Model	R square	Adjusted R square	R square change	$\beta$	t
Variables included in the modelo						
1. Cultural dissonance		0.3	0.29	0.3	-0.55	-6.92***
2. Ethnic discrimination at school		0.37	0.36	0.07	-0.27	-3.43**
3. School adjustment		0.43	0.41	0.06	0.29	3.38**
4. Psychological Well-being		0.46	0.44	0.03	0.21	2.61*

Source: own work.

\*  $p < 0.05$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Given that cultural dissonance, psychological well-being, school adjustment, and ethnic discrimination perception at school explained academic performance perceptions' variability, a multiple mediation model was explored. Thus, in order to know the possible dampening effects of cultural dissonance on academic performance, we present the analysis of mediation system-based macro SPSS from Sobel Test, which determines whether the indirect mediators effect is significantly different from zero. If the confidence interval does not include 0, then the effect is significant and mediation exists (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) (Figure 1).

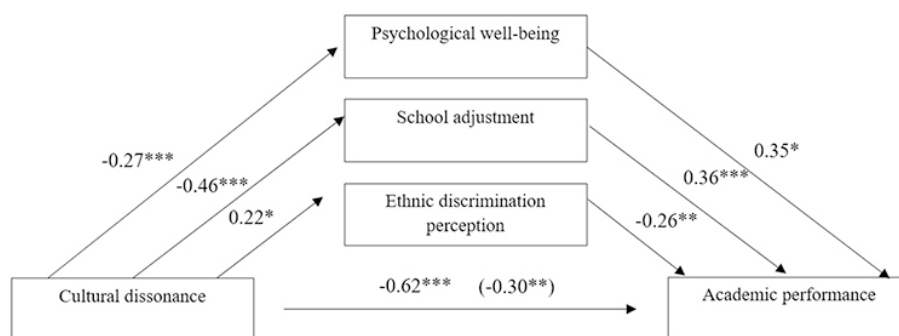


Figure 1.

Mediation model testing the effect of cultural dissonance on academic performance through psychological well-being, school adjustment, and ethnic discrimination.

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Source: own work.

The mediation model showed that regarding the total effect, cultural dissonance had a significant negative association with academic performance. Concerning to proposed mediators, cultural dissonance showed a negative effect on psychological well-being. Conversely, it was found that psychological well-being had a positive effect on perceived academic performance. School adjustment was negatively affected by

cultural dissonance and its effect on academic performance was positive. Cultural dissonance showed a positive effect on perceived ethnic discrimination at school, and in turn it had a negative effect on perceived academic performance. The three standardized indirect effects of cultural dissonance on academic performance through psychological well-being ( $B=0.05$ ;  $SE=0.02$  IC 95% [-0.11 -0.01]), school adjustment ( $B=-0.14$ ;  $SE=0.05$  IC 95% [-0.26 -0.06]), and ethnic discrimination perceived at school ( $B=-0.08$ ;  $SE=0.04$  IC 95% [-0.18 -0.02]) were also significant.

As shown in Figure 1, the direct effect continued being significant when all variables were in the model, but the effects of the mediating variables reduced the correlation between predictor and criterion, so the result is partial mediation of the aforementioned variables. The complete model accounted for approximately 46% of the variance in academic performance.

## Discussion

Results show that school performance perceived by immigrant students is largely determined by how they perceive discrepancies between cultural elements promoted for their families and schools. Cultural dissonance arises when immigrant youth confront with information and values at school that are not coherent with their beliefs or traditions at home. This might be an explanation of why cultural dissonance is sometimes said to inhibit socio-cultural adaptation (Chiu et al., 2016; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

In addition, adolescents with the feeling that they are treated unfairly or discriminated by teachers and classmates because of their ethnicity, and even though they are satisfied with their experiences at school, decide to keep their culture of origin, to the detriment of the culture of the host society. This finding points out to the centrality of social identity and the influence of positive recognition and appreciation of cultural peculiarities of students in the teaching and learning process in the school that leads to a successful academic performance.

Research about the academic outcomes of immigrant students confirms their disadvantage at school in comparison to local peers, and that this difference is associated with psychosocial and educational context variables (Choi & Calero, 2013; 2012; Mera, Martínez-Taboada, & Elgorriaga 2014; Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, 2010, 2013). In this context, the disadvantage faced by immigrant students' at school has been related to teachers' prejudices, insufficient training resources, and the lack of a school curriculum tailored to the multicultural student body (Etxeberria & Elosegi, 2010).

The current study is one of the few highlighting the importance of a wide array of psychosocial dimensions of education and learning, including cultural dissonance between home and school, school adjustment, psychological well-being, and ethnic discrimination at school. In this way, cultural dissonance, measured in terms of values

and attitudes between home and school, is one of the most relevant explanatory variables that influence perceived academic performance.

Considering that family is the principal source for the construction of adolescents' subjectivity (Erikson, 1968) and the relevance of prior school history (Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001), it is clear why the incorporation of a different education process transmitted by the host society in a context that is perceived as discordant with family's cultural values might have a negative socio-cognitive impact on adolescents. The results of the mediation analysis show a significant negative association of cultural dissonance with psychological well-being, school adjustment, and perception of ethnic discrimination, and its negative effect on perceived academic performance. The influence of cultural dissonance on academic performance of immigrant adolescents reflects the importance of managing cultural differences among students of diverse ethnicities and status, and between immigrant students and their teachers.

The obtained results confirmed most of our hypotheses, although there are some limitations. Contrary to our initial hypotheses and to prior research reports (Berry et al., 2006; Mindlis & Boffetta, 2017), no statistical relation was found between academic achievement and length of residence in Spain, neither with other acculturation orientations, such as, integration, individualism, assimilation, and marginalization. Several factors could explain these results. A possible explanation could be the fact that they sample belonged to first generation families and had not been living long enough in Spain. Another limitation can be that it is a heterogeneous sample with a majority of Latin American students. However, this distribution was proportional to the reality of multicultural classrooms in Spain. It would be interesting to replicate this study with a more homogeneous sample in order to facilitate inter-group comparisons regarding the ethnicity of the students. Nevertheless, the sample of subjects responds to the reality and proportion of the population of immigrant students in our schools and the results of the regression analyses show that most of the explanatory or predictive variables are psychosocial. Another limitation of this study is that due to Spanish data protection rules we could not have access to the students real grades. Despite these limitations, findings illustrate the impact of cultural dissonance in educational reality; however, additional studies with bigger samples and including second-generation immigrants are needed.

Positive recognition and legitimization of students' personal, social, and cultural characteristics as well as their potential for development are essential to facilitate educational processes, negotiation, and articulation of new meanings (Feuerstein, 2001; Vigotsky, 2000; Chiu et al., 2016). Literature consistently indicates that educational processes are successful to the degree to which the school environment facilitates students' construction of positive identities, and to the extent to which educational contents are meaningful not only to most students, but also specifically to minority group members, such as immigrant students (Carter, 2006; Feuerstein 2001; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Vigotsky, 2000). This is a complex task not frequently undertaken at school.

In this sense, these results suggest that when perceptions of cultural dissonance are accompanied by the feeling of being unfairly treated because of one's own ethnicity, the preference for in-group cultural background –beyond representing a rejection attitude towards the host community culture– could also imply a poorer disposition towards education and learning academic content. Furthermore, these findings confirm the key role that some psychosocial processes play at school, not only in improving academic performance, but also influencing perceptions of well-being and social integration.

The current educational reality requires several psychosocial efforts in order to construct a multicultural society, more inclusive and understanding towards youth. If the educational system continues to reproduce dynamics of social inequality between the immigrant and local populations, cultural separation and school failure might become chronic. Management of the socio-cultural dimension of education is crucial to promote better social relationships and cultural adjustment among immigrant and local students. The results show the importance of implementing educational policies that support immigrant students' school achievement and that take into account cultural minority divergences and their relationship with peer groups, thus facilitating common behaviors and activities.

This study shows how academic performance is negatively related to student's perception of cultural dissonance, discrimination, and separation. The impact that perceptions of cultural dissonance and acculturation orientations have on immigrant students, point out to the extent to which educational institutions need to include programs to prevent ethnic discrimination and cultural dissonance at school as a psychosocial systematic target aimed at improving well-being and academic achievement of all students including immigrant minorities. In line with other investigations (Alfaro & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Campos, 2008), this study highlights the need to improve relationships between families and school in order to foster the perception of psychosocial well-being and academic performance of adolescents. Educational policies need to be based on regular interaction with family values and attitudes and should facilitate a perception of a socio-cultural congruent exchange.

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## Notes

- \* Research article.

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